



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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I am submitting testimony in support of HB 5616 AAC the Licensure of Advanced Practice Dental Hygienists.

Although this bill is before you in proposed bill format, this concept is not new to the General Assembly. Last year this committee passed legislation that established a pilot program to establish a dental hygiene practitioner in public health settings.

Those who oppose this legislation will raise concerns about public safety. To allay those concerns I would point to the nurse practitioner model which was originally opposed by physicians and now has been well integrated into medical practice and gained acceptance by both physicians and patients.

An advanced practice dental hygienist would have additional educational requirements. Today's dentists complete course work, pass exams and are then certified by their educational institution as eligible for practice. We do not second guess that institution. We operate under the presumption that they are qualified upon graduation. The same standards should apply for the advanced dental hygiene practitioner.

Health care resources are becoming scarce. To assure those dollars are cost effective, we must use individual personnel to their full capacity. Clinicians should be assigned to perform services based on the level of service needed – matching the patient's needs with the appropriate provider. This is

particularly important for public health dental programs that operate on minimal budgets.

It is often difficult to recruit dentists to public health settings because salaries are lower than the private sector. The Hartford School System lost one of their dentists in September and there have been no applicants for this posted position.

The value of an advanced practitioner in the dental setting has been recognized by national organizations such as the Pew Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation and the Center for Health Professions. In the Pew Foundation ratings of states, despite an overall good rating, Connecticut was cited for not authorizing a primary care dental provider.

The advanced dental hygiene practitioner would practice in collaboration with a dentist who would serve as a resource when needed. The collaborative model is a team approach and does not serve to fragment care.

As the committee deliberates the potential of this legislation to improve access to treatment services and reduce costs, I ask you to consider establishing the advanced dental hygiene practitioner. The longer we wait the greater the risk that children will suffer unnecessary pain that can easily be prevented.

Sincerely,

Vickie Nardello
State Representative